DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 574 HE 003 706

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TITLE	Student Opinion Survey: Survey Study 2. 1972 Freshmen.
INSTITUTION	State Univ. of New York, Buffalo. Univ. Research Office.
PUB DATE	Sep 72
NOTE	14p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*College Freshmen; *College Students; *Higher Education; *Student Attitudes; *Student Opinion

ABSTRACT

The Summer Planning Conferences are sessions attended by incoming freshmen to orient them to the State University of New York at Buffalo. During the day and a half they attend a conference, these future students become acquainted with the campus, they plan their academic program for the fall semester, and they complete various inventories for research purposes. One such inventory completed by the 1972 freshmen class was the Student Opinion Survey, a survey designed to elicit incoming freshmen's opinions about the following topics: politics, the United States, welfare and poverty, social class and mobility, and race. These students expressed a desire for democracy and egalitarianism. They favored citizen participation in government. They did not seem to be optimistic about social equality becoming a reality, though they were in favor of economic assistance to those who need it. Financial help seems to be the extent to which these students believe that social equality should be overtly encouraged, and they did not impute to either whites or non-whites a special obligation to work toward racial equality. (Author/HS)

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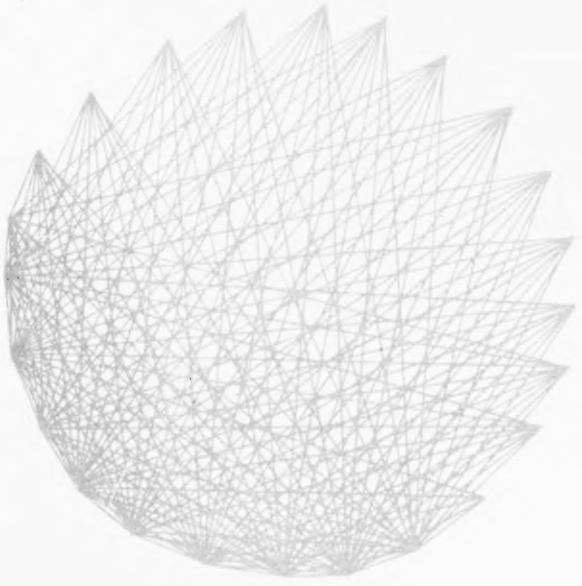
Student Opinion Survey



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Survey Study 2
1972 Freshmen

University Research
Division of Student Affairs and Services
State University of New York at Buffalo

HE 003 706

ED 071574

STUDENT OPINION SURVEY

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September 1972

FOREWORD

The Summer Planning Conferences are sessions attended by incoming freshmen to orient them to SUNY/B. During the day and a half which they attend a Conference, these future students become acquainted with the campus, they plan their academic program for the fall semester, and they complete various inventories for research purposes. The latter are administered by University Research. In 1972, ten Conferences were held, between June 28 and August 2. During that time, seven inventories were administered.

One of the inventories, the Inventory of Opinions and Expectations, was completed by the participants at each Conference. Each group also completed one or two of the other inventories. Each of the additional inventories was completed by two Conference groups.

The Student Opinion Survey was designed to elicit incoming freshmen's opinions about the following topics: politics, the United States, welfare and poverty, social class and mobility, and race. Respondents reported their opinion of 53 statements on a five-point scale, from "strongly agree" through 'strongly disagree." Responses were given on IBM answer sheets. Students also indicated their sex, home town setting, and planned major field.

The following report, *Student Opinion Survey*, is part of the University Research Student Survey series and is the first report concerning 1972 incoming freshmen.

CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	*ii*
LIST OF TABLES	*iv*
Politics	1
The United States	3
Welfare, Poverty	3
Social Class, Mobility	5
Racial Civil Rights	6
Summary	7
APPENDIX	8

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Sex, Home Town Setting, and Planned Major Field. .	2
2	Politics	2
3	The United States.	3
4	Welfare, Poverty	4
5	Social Class, Mobility	5
6	Racial Civil Rights.	6

STUDENT OPINION SURVEY

The Student Opinion Survey (SOS) was completed by incoming freshmen who attended the July 17 and July 19 Summer Planning Conferences. One hundred respondents attended the first Conference, and 136, the second. They comprise 95% of the incoming freshmen who attended these two Conferences. Throughout this report, the terms "incoming freshmen," "respondents," "students," and "the sample" are used interchangeably.

The percentage of students in each sex, home town setting, and planned major field category is presented in Table 1. Slightly more women than men completed the SOS (54% vs. 45%, respectively). The home town of nearly half the sample (49%) was a suburb, 42% lived in an urban setting, and 8% were from a rural area. The Faculty with the largest percentage of new majors was Health Sciences, chosen by 24% of the sample. One fifth were still undecided about a major. The classifications of major fields and the number of students in each are presented in the appendix.

The response scale for the SOS statements is:

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = have no opinion
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

The responses to each statement are presented in terms of their mean value and standard deviation, based on the number who responded to that statement. Each statement was responded to by at least 95% of the sample.

The statements are loosely grouped under five topics: politics, the United States, welfare and poverty, social class and mobility, and racial civil rights, and are reported in terms of these topics.

Politics

The sample's responses to statements concerning politics indicate a preference for citizen participation in government (Table 2). They felt most positively about the statement "Far too few people get involved in politics" and most negatively about "Politics should be left to politicians, not to average citizens." Although they agreed slightly that "Everyone should, at one time or another, be active in politics (besides voting)," they disagreed that non-voters should be fined for not voting.

Even though these students had recently witnessed several months of presidential primary contests, and the Democratic national convention had been held the week before they completed the SOS, the sample did not have a strong opinion about the usefulness of either the primaries or conventions in choosing a presidential candidate. They disagreed somewhat that "Most public officials work hard for their constituents."

TABLE 1: SEX, HOME TOWN SETTING, AND PLANNED MAJOR FIELD
(Percent in Each)

SEX	%
Men	45
Women	54
Not Reported	1

HOME TOWN SETTING	%
Urban	42
Suburban	49
Rural	8
Not Reported	1

PLANNED MAJOR FIELD	%
Arts and Letters	6
Educational Studies	2
Engineering and Applied Sciences	6
Health Sciences	24
Natural Sciences and Mathematics	15
Social Sciences and Administration	16
School of Management	4
Special or Other Major	5
Undecided	20
Not Reported	2

N=236.

TABLE 2: POLITICS

STATEMENT	TOTAL M	TOTAL SD
Far too few people get involved in politics.	2.21	.89
The minimum age limits for federal office are too high.	2.68	1.11
Everyone should, at one time or another, be active in politics (besides voting).	2.78	1.09
National political convention delegates usually choose a presidential candidate who is really the people's choice.	3.11	1.02
The presidential primaries are a waste of time, money, and effort.	3.23	1.18
Most public officials work hard for their constituents.	3.40	1.03
People who don't vote in elections for public officials should be fined.	4.03	.99
Politics should be left to politicians, not to average citizens.	4.33	.94

N=236.

TABLE 3: THE UNITED STATES

STATEMENT	TOTAL M	TOTAL SD
Americans have a lot to feel proud of.	2.07	.79
The U.S. should reduce its military commitments to other countries.	2.07	1.09
Americans can feel lucky to be Americans.	2.45	1.02
The American way of life fosters greed.	2.57	1.01
Americans have a lot to feel ashamed of.	2.61	1.18
The U.S. has an obligation to share its technology with the rest of the world.	2.64	1.11
Even with all its faults, the U.S. is the best country to live in.	2.78	1.04
Of all the nations in the world, the United States is the best.	2.97	1.10
Americans, as a nationality, feel a sense of community with their fellow Americans.	3.46	.99
The American way of life rewards honesty.	3.73	.87

N=236.

The United States

Ten statements described various attitudes about life in this country (Table 3). These students agreed that Americans have a lot to feel proud of. They also agreed, to a lesser extent, that Americans have a lot to feel ashamed of. Concerning the effect of the American way of life on its citizens, they felt somewhat positively that it fosters greed, but does not reward honesty.

They tended to agree that the U.S. should share its technology with the rest of the world. An exception apparently is military technology -- one of the statements with which they agreed most strongly was "The U.S. should reduce its military commitments to other countries."

Although they agreed that Americans can feel lucky to be Americans, they disagreed that Americans felt a sense of community with their fellow citizens. In general, they did not seem to feel very positive or negative about the country. They tended to have no opinion about the statements: "Even with all its faults, the U.S. is the best country to live in" and "Of all the nations in the world, the U.S. is the best."

Welfare, Poverty

These students agreed that there should be a national system of aid to help the unfortunate, and they did not think that the current system is adequate (Table 4). They did not extend the need for welfare to industry, however; there was slight disagreement that "The federal government should do whatever is necessary to keep large corporations from going out of business."

TABLE 4: WELFARE, POVERTY

STATEMENT	Men M	Men SD	Women M	Women SD	TOTAL M	TOTAL SD
The current welfare system should be changed.					1.71	.84
There should be a national program to guarantee a job for everyone who wants to work.					1.88	.98
The United States is a rich country and therefore should help its less fortunate citizens.					2.06	.90
*People on welfare are looked down on by other people.	2.20	.89	2.45	.91	2.33	.91
*People are less likely to work when they can go on welfare.	2.35	1.06	2.64	1.05	2.51	1.07
*The federal government should guarantee a minimum income for everyone.	2.83	1.34	2.54	1.20	2.67	1.27
Most people on welfare could work if they really wanted to.					2.68	1.13
Being on welfare is humiliating.					3.09	1.00
The problem with welfare is that too little help is given to welfare recipients.					3.18	1.08
*The federal government should do whatever is necessary to keep large corporations from going out of business.	3.42	1.11	3.13	.92	3.26	1.02
If people are poor, it's their own fault.					4.05	.88

N=236.
*Men and Women differed significantly ($p<.05$).

They agreed somewhat that "People are less likely to work when they can go on welfare" and that "Most people on welfare could work if they really wanted to." However, they definitely disagreed that people are poor due to their own doing.

They agreed that being on welfare has some negative effect on the recipients; i.e., they are "...looked down on by other people." They were not willing to agree, though, that being on welfare is humiliating.

TABLE 5: SOCIAL CLASS, MOBILITY

STATEMENT	TOTAL M	TOTAL SD
Manual work is as important as intellectual work.	1.91	.85
"Reverse discrimination" (e.g., hiring a non-white instead of a white or a female instead of a male) is as bad as the past discrimination it's supposed to offset.	2.00	.98
There will always be a lower class, regardless of the political or economic system.	2.25	.84
People learn things at college that can't be learned in any other way.	2.95	1.12
Anybody can get a good education, whether they go to college or not.	3.16	1.15
Anybody who wants to get ahead in life can do so.	3.16	1.20
American society encourages people to achieve to their full potential.	3.18	1.04
Only college-educated people should be public leaders.	3.94	1.04
Manual labor is degrading.	4.12	.95

N=236.

Welfare and Poverty is the only area of the SOS in which a number of responses (4 out of 11) described any pattern of sex differences, although the pattern is quite weak. (Sex differences were analyzed via *t* tests.)

Women expressed a somewhat more positive attitude toward welfare and welfare recipients than men did, i.e., women were more favorable than men were toward a guaranteed minimum income and government intervention to keep large corporations in business. Men, on the other hand, were more likely than women were to agree that welfare recipients are looked down on and that people are less likely to work when they can go on welfare.

This pattern is weak because the sexes did not differ on other statements concerning welfare and poverty, e.g., a call for guaranteed jobs.

Social Class, Mobility

In some respects, the sample exhibited an egalitarian attitude toward social class and mobility (Table 5). They agreed that "Manual work is as important as intellectual work" and disagreed that "Manual work is degrading" and that "Only college-educated people should be public leaders."

They expressed no opinion about the efficacy of attending college to get an education. They neither believed nor disbelieved in the Horatio Alger phenomenon, i.e., that "Anyone who wants to get ahead in life can do so." They were also noncommittal about American society's role in people achieving their full potential.

They did not appear hopeful that an egalitarian society would ever occur, however. They agreed that "There will always be a lower class, regardless of the political or economic system." Moreover, they agreed that "reverse discrimination," one current approach toward equality, is as bad as the past discrimination it's supposed to offset. They were not asked whether or not they thought that "reverse discrimination" was necessary or even tolerable as a means to achieve equality.

TABLE 6: RACIAL CIVIL RIGHTS

STATEMENT	TOTAL M	TOTAL SD
Children should not be bussed in order to achieve racial balance.	2.53	1.20
The goal of racial equality should be given top priority by everyone.	2.57	1.05
Within twenty years, interracial marriage will be commonplace.	2.77	.96
Integrated housing is necessary to achieve racial equality.	2.86	1.14
Each race has special strengths or talents.	2.86	1.25
Non-whites who have "made it" have an obligation to help those who haven't.	3.04	1.11
Whites have a moral duty to help non-whites to achieve equality.	3.11	1.12
Violence may be resorted to only after all other means have failed.	3.16	1.35
Bussing school children is necessary to achieve racial equality.	3.57	1.17
Integrated housing should be mandatory.	3.74	1.15
Whites owe "reparations" to non-whites.	3.76	1.05
People should not date members of other races.	3.97	1.04
Interracial dating is OK as long as it doesn't result in marriage.	4.03	.79
People should go out of their way to date members of other races.	4.08	.85
Violence is a legitimate means of gaining civil rights.	4.16	.99

N=236.

Racial Civil Rights

These students were not eager to solve the problem of racial inequality, though they agreed (but not strongly) that "the goal of racial equality should be given top priority by everyone" (Table 6). They tended to either have no opinion or to disagree with the fifteen statements concerning racial civil rights.

Their lack of overt enthusiasm was extended to whites and non-whites alike. They had no opinion about either of these statements: "Non-whites who have 'made it' have an obligation to help those who haven't" and "Whites have a moral duty to help non-whites to achieve equality." Moreover, they rather disagreed with the statement "Whites owe 'reparations' to non-whites."

Theories abound as to how racial equality might be achieved. Among others, some possibilities are: violence, bussing, housing, dating and marriage, and employment. The SOS contained statements concerning the implementation of these means to equality.

Regarding violence,the sample disagreed that it is a legitimate means of gaining civil rights, but they had no opinion about violence as a last resort.

They tended to be rather anti-bussing. They agreed that children should not be bussed and disagreed that bussing is necessary for racial equality.

They did not express a strong opinion about integrated housing as a means to equality. They agreed slightly that integrated housing is necessary to achieve equality, but disagreed slightly that it should be mandatory.

While they expected, though only weakly, that interracial marriage will be commonplace within twenty years, they definitely disagreed that there should be any pressure either toward or away from interracial dating.

The sample was most positive in their opinions about employment and income.[1] They were definitely in agreement that there should be a national program to provide jobs for all who want to work and that the United States should help its less fortunate citizens. Our "less fortunates" are often non-whites, though the latter statements were not couched in terms of race. However, as was reported above,[2] these students felt that "reverse discrimination," such as hiring a non-white instead of a white, was as bad as the original discrimination.

Summary

These students expressed a desire for democracy and egalitarianism. They favored citizen participation in government. They did not seem to be optimistic about social equality becoming a reality, however, though they were in favor of economic assistance to those who need it.

Financial help seems to be the extent to which these students think that social equality should be overtly encouraged, either by the government or anyone else. They did not impute to either whites or non-whites a special obligation to work toward racial equality.

Their lack of opinion on two issues is interesting. Just prior to their completing the SOS, the media had been filled with news of presidential primaries and the national political conventions. It is surprising (and perhaps disappointing) that their average responses to statements concerning the primaries and conventions were close to the "no opinion" option.

Even more surprising is their lack of opinion about the statements "People learn things at college that can't be learned in any other way" and "Anybody can get a good education, whether they go to college or not." Rather, they might be expected to assume that attending college will mean the difference being or not being well educated.

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[1] See Welfare, Poverty, pp. 3-5.

[2] See Social Class, Mobility, p.5.

APPENDIX

CLASSIFICATION OF MAJOR FIELDS AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH

MAJOR FIELD	N MAJOR	TOTAL
Arts and Letters		15
American Studies	-	
Architecture and Environmental Design	2	
Art	4	
Art History	-	
Classics	-	
Critical Languages	-	
English	-	
French	1	
German, Slavic, Russian	1	
Music	2	
Spanish, Italian, Portugese	4	
Theater	1	
Educational Studies		5
Engineering and Applied Sciences		15
Health Sciences		56
Biochemical Pharmacology	2	
Biochemistry	4	
Medical Technology	10	
Nursing	16	
Occupational Therapy	4	
Pharmacy	10	
Physical Therapy	10	
Natural Sciences and Mathematics		35
Biology	25	
Chemistry	4	
Geological Sciences	1	
Mathematics	5	
Physics and Astronomy	-	
Statistics	-	

(Continued on next page.)

APPENDIX

CLASSIFICATION OF MAJOR FIELDS AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH (Cont'd)

MAJOR FIELD	N MAJOR	N TOTAL
Social Sciences and Administration		38
Anthropology	-	
Economics	2	
Geography	-	
History	1	
Linguistics	1	
Philosophy	1	
Political Science	10	
Psychology	12	
Social Policies and Community Service	3	
Sociology	4	
Speech Communication	2	
Speech Pathology	2	
School of Management		10
Double or Special Major		11
Double	2	
Special	9	
Undecided		47
Not Reported		4

N=236.